

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

“He Was Sent For Me”

April 20, 2005, at the Airport in Knoxville, waiting to board the plane, I had the Bible on my lap and was very intent upon what I was doing. I'd had a marvelous morning with the Lord. I say this because I want to tell you it is a scary thing to have the Spirit of God really working in you. You could end up doing some things you never would have done otherwise. Life in the Spirit can be dangerous for a thousand reasons not the least of which is your ego.

I tried to keep from staring, but he was such a strange sight. Humped over in a wheelchair, he was skin and bones, dressed in clothes that obviously fit when he was at least twenty pounds heavier. His knees protruded from his trousers, and his shoulders looked like the coat hanger was still in his shirt. His hands looked like tangled masses of veins and bones. The strangest part of him was his hair and nails. Stringy, gray hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back. His fingernails were long, clean but strangely out of place on an old man.

I looked down at my Bible as fast as I could, discomfort burning my face. As I tried to imagine what his story might have been, I found myself wondering if I'd just had a Howard Hughes sighting. Then, remembered that he was dead. So this man in the airport ... an impersonator maybe? Was a camera on us somewhere? There I sat trying to concentrate on the Word to keep from being concerned about a thin slice of humanity served on a wheelchair only a few seats from me.

All the while, my heart was growing more and more overwhelmed with a feeling for him.

Let's admit it. Curiosity is a heap more comfortable than true concern, and suddenly I was awash with aching emotion for this bizarre-looking old man. I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen. And it may be embarrassing.

I immediately began to resist because I could feel God working on my spirit and I started arguing with God in my mind. "Oh, no, God, please, no." I looked up at the ceiling as if I could stare straight through it into heaven and said, "Don't make me witness to this man. Not right here and now. Please. I'll do anything. Put me on the same plane, but don't make me get up here and witness to this man in front of this gawking audience. Please, Lord!"

There I sat in the blue vinyl chair begging His Highness, "Please don't make me witness to this man. Not now. I'll do it on the plane." Then I heard it... "I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair." The words were so clear, my heart leapt into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top. Do I witness to the man or brush his hair? I looked straight back up at the ceiling and said, "God, as I live and breathe, I want you to know I am ready to witness to this man. I'm on this Lord. I'm your girl! You've never seen a woman witness to a man faster in your life. What difference does it make if his hair is a mess if he is not redeemed? I am going to witness to this man." Again as clearly as I've ever heard an audible word, God seemed to write this statement across the wall of my mind. "That is not what I said, Beth. I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to go brush his hair."

I looked up at God and quipped, "I don't have a hairbrush. It's in my suitcase on the plane. How am I supposed to brush his hair without a hairbrush?" God was so insistent that I almost involuntarily began to walk toward him as these thoughts came to me from God's word: "I will thoroughly furnish you unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:17)

I stumbled over to the wheelchair thinking I could use one myself. Even as I retell this story, my pulse quickens and I feel those same butterflies. I knelt down in front of the man and asked as demurely as possible, "Sir, May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?"

He looked back at me and said, "What did you say?"

"May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?"

To which he responded in volume ten, "Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you're going to have to talk louder than that."

At this point, I took a deep breath and blurted out, "SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BRUSHING YOUR HAIR?"

At which point every eye in the place darted right at me. I was the only thing in the room looking more peculiar than old Mr. Longlocks. Face crimson and forehead breaking out in a sweat, I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face, and say, "If you really want to."

Are you kidding? Of course I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then. He pressed on my heart until I could utter the words, "Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush." "I have one in my bag," he responded. I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees and unzipped the stranger's old carry-on, hardly believing what I was doing. I stood up and started brushing the old man's hair. It was perfectly clean, but it was tangled and matted. I don't do many things well, but must admit I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair mothering two little girls. Like I'd done with either Amanda or Melissa in such a condition, I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time not to pull.

A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair. Everybody else in the room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me. I brushed and I brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out of that hair. I know this sounds so strange, but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life. I believe with all my heart, I - for that few minutes - felt a portion of the very love of God. That He had overtaken my heart for a little while like someone renting a room and making Himself at home for a short while. The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew they had to be God's. His hair was finally as soft and smooth as an infant's.

I slipped the brush back in the bag and went around the chair to face him. I got back down on my knees, put my hands on his knees and said, "Sir, do you know my Jesus?"

He said, "Yes, I do." Well, that figures, I thought.

He explained, "I've known Him since I married my bride. She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior." He said, "You see, the problem is, I haven't seen my bride in months. I've had open-heart surgery, and she's been too ill to come see me. I was sitting here thinking to myself, what a mess I must be for my bride."

Only God knows how often He allows us to be part of a divine moment when we're completely unaware of the significance. This, on the other hand, was one of those rare encounters when I knew God had intervened in details only He could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it. Our time came to board, and we were not on the same plane. I was deeply ashamed of how I'd acted earlier and would have been so proud to have accompanied him on that aircraft.

I still had a few minutes, and as I gathered my things to board, the airline hostess returned from the corridor, tears streaming down her cheeks. She said, "That old man's sitting on the plane, sobbing. Why did you do that? What made you do that?"

I said, "Do you know Jesus? He can be the bossiest thing!"

And we got to share. I learned something about God that day. He knows if you're exhausted, you're hungry, you're serving in the wrong place or it is time to move on but you feel too responsible to budge. He knows if you're hurting or feeling rejected. He knows if you're sick or drowning under a wave of temptation. Or He knows if you just need your hair brushed. He sees you as an individual. Tell Him your need!

I got on my own flight, sobs choking my throat, wondering how many opportunities just like that one had I missed along the way, all because I didn't want people to think I was strange. God didn't send me to that old man. He sent that old man to me.

By Beth Moore